



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Observes World AIDS Day ***Department of Health Urges Testing for At-Risk People***

BISMARCK, N.D. – In observance of World AIDS Day December 1, the North Dakota Department of Health is urging people at risk for HIV/AIDS to get tested, according to Melissa Casteel, HIV/AIDS Program manager for the Department of Health.

Established by the World Health Organization in 1988, World AIDS Day serves to focus global attention on the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The 2006 World AIDS Day theme promoted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is *The Promise of Partnerships*. According to Casteel, observation of this day provides an opportunity for governments, national AIDS programs, churches, community organizations and individuals to demonstrate the importance of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

An estimated 1 million people in the United States are HIV positive, and approximately 40,000 new infections occur every year. About one-fourth of the people estimated to be HIV positive are believed to be unaware of their infections, underscoring the need for increased efforts to reach at-risk populations with HIV testing and prevention services.

“North Dakotans should be reminded that HIV/AIDS does not discriminate,” Casteel said. “December 1st serves to remind everyone that the U.S. – like other nations around the world – is deeply affected by this epidemic. Action makes a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS.”

The Department of Health urges anyone who has ever put himself or herself at risk for HIV by engaging in risky behavior to get tested. Risky behavior includes unprotected sex, needle sharing for drug use, or tattooing and body piercing. HIV testing is available at test sites throughout the state. The test sites are staffed by trained personnel who offer free and confidential HIV testing, pre- and post-test counseling, and referrals to those at risk. HIV can be prevented by avoiding or not engaging in risky behaviors.

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“Low perception of risk, fear, stigma and discrimination continue to pose major challenges for effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care,” Casteel said. “Fear of discrimination may prevent people from getting tested or seeking treatment that could improve the quality of their lives.”

As of June 30, 2006, 369 cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported in North Dakota since HIV/AIDS surveillance began in 1984. Most of the cases were between the ages of 20 and 39 at the time of diagnosis.

For information about HIV testing and other HIV/AIDS services, call the North Dakota Department of Health HIV/AIDS Program hotline at 800.70.NDHIV or visit the program’s website at www.ndhiv.com.

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